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The Formation Motivation and Comprehension Mechanism of the Intensifying Construction "méi nàme/zhème X (fǎn)"

Weixian Shang

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China
202420212095@bfsu.edu.cn

Abstract. The Chinese subjective de-intensifying construction "méi nàme/zhème X" has spawned an intensifying construction "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" in new media. Based on 210 online corpora, this paper examines the formation motivation, interpretation mechanism and communication constraints of this construction within the frameworks of Construction Grammar and Interactional Linguistics. The study finds that this construction achieves polarity reversal through irony rhetoric, and is endowed with pragmatic motivation for intensifying interpretation by superimposing the opinion identification mechanism of online communities. The interpretation of this construction first eliminates low-information ambiguity based on conversational implicature, then establishes scalar reference using metaphors/hyperboles in the antecedent, and finally realizes intensifying evaluation through polarity reversal and comparison. The spread of this construction faces three constraints: cognitive load, media dependence and community binding. The research shows that this construction embodies a typical path of new media linguistic innovation: starting from community pragmatic innovation, emerging through interaction, and forming a relatively stable construction function in communication.

Keywords: méi zhème/nàme X, intensifying construction, pragmatic inference, speech community, scalarity

1. Introduction

"méi nàme/zhème X" is a common subjective de-intensifying construction in modern Chinese. As shown in Example 1, the speaker combines the negative marker "méi" with the subjective demonstrative pronouns "zhème" and "nàme" to downgrade the degree of a thing's property, expressing evaluation or revising a stance:

Example 1: A: "If I don't use Iron Palm and Divine Claw Skill, I'll gouge your eyes out for sure."
B: "It's not that serious, is it?"

However, a new type of "méi zhème/nàme X" construction has emerged on today's new media platforms. Its literal form is identical to the typical "méi zhème/nàme X" construction, but X is the antonym of the property of the thing mentioned by both parties in the conversation. The listener intentionally extracts the property of the thing, processes it antonymously, and inserts it into the original construction to form a new intensifying comment expression, as follows:

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Example 2: (Background event: Low-quality, tacky songs from the sinking market were adapted and performed on variety shows)

A (short video creator, a self-media music critic): Maybe I really have to wait until the day I'm catheterized to see consumers start boycotting this kind of music.

(Comments from different speakers B, C, D, E, etc. in the bullet screen)

B: Not that soon.

C: Liked, liked, that's so well said.

D: Not that early.

E: Exactly, many good works are less famous than these songs.

F: Yes!!!

A's evaluation of the background event means that "he will have to wait until he is very old and unable to take care of himself to see low-quality musical works boycotted by the audience", expressing disappointment with the music taste in the current mass market and believing that it will be a long time before low-quality works are boycotted. This view has gained widespread recognition among viewers of A's video, with different viewers commenting in the bullet screen such as "Exactly", "Yes", "That's so well said", etc. Among the many bullet screens agreeing with A's view, expressions like "Not that soon" and "Not that early" appeared, meaning "the actual time when low-quality musical works are boycotted is not as soon/early as A said", which is an intensifying expression of the lateness mentioned by A[1]. Speakers B and D use the "méi nàme X" expression to reinforce A's emotional tendency and degree judgment.

Such "méi zhème/nàme X" constructions that express intensification are the main research object of this paper. For the convenience of discussion, hereinafter, "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" will refer to the confirmed intensifying construction, "méi zhème/nàme X (zhèng)" will refer to the typical subjective de-intensifying construction, and "méi zhème/nàme X" will refer to all "méi zhème/nàme X" constructions with unclear intensifying, de-intensifying or scalar effects.

Previous studies have provided enlightenment and reference for the formation motivation and comprehension mechanism of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction. Wu Fuxiang's research on "X bù bǐ Y·Z" elaborated the counter-expectation function of comparative constructions and pointed out that the essence of expectation is subjectivity [1]. This study suggests that we use the perspectives of expectation and subjectification to examine the interpretation process and rhetorical function of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" expression, which also belongs to comparative sentences. Zong Shouyun's analysis of "X bǐ Y hái W" pointed out that even if the comparative items belong to different categories, rhetorical effects can be produced by extracting similar properties, and "maintaining the original relationship is the normal expectation, while reversing the original relationship is counter-expectation" [2]. This study shows that speakers can also extract similar properties of different comparative items and put them into the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction, and reverse the original relationship simultaneously while reversing the antonym of X to achieve counter-expectation effects. At the pragmatic level, the intensifying interpretation of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction relies on the derivation of conversational implicature. Suo Zhenyu systematically expounded the generation mechanism of conversational implicature and

[1] On the issue of how to understand "Not that soon" here, we conducted a questionnaire survey for all age groups. Among 112 questionnaires, 61.61% of the respondents chose the interpretation of agreement and intensification, and 9.82% chose the interpretation of disagreement and intensification, with a total of 71.43% of the respondents choosing the intensifying interpretation.

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pointed out that it often stems from the intentional violation of some maxims under the Cooperative Principle [3]. The dialogue using the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction is a cooperative dialogue, and this judgment is related to the origin of the construction, which comes from the speech communities formed in cyberspace [4], and the nature of these communities themselves to "achieve close community cohesion by emphasizing opinion identification" in the process of users doing things with words [5-7].

We manually collected and examined 55 "méi zhème X (fǎn)" and 155 "méi nàme X (fǎn)" constructions contained in 102 topics from the comment sections and bullet screens of Bilibili, Xiaohongshu and Douyin platforms. This paper argues that the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction uses negative markers to act on the scalarity of things, triggers counter-expectation over-interpretation by intentionally violating communicative principles, and is used by younger student groups in the context of strengthened opinion identification and loosened language norms on new media platforms, developing an intensifying function to express exaggeration, irony or emotional identification.

2. The comprehension process of intensifying expressions

The comprehensibility of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction varies among different groups. It may seem incomprehensible or uncooperative, but this form appears concentratedly in certain internet topics and leads to an intensifying interpretation of the properties of things, showing a tendency to form a fixed function. The specific mechanism for understanding the intensifying interpretation of this construction is as follows:

2.1. Pragmatic disambiguation and contrast enhancement

Speakers using the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" expression intentionally violate some sub-maxims under the Cooperative Principle, enabling hearers to conduct pragmatic reasoning, eliminate ambiguity, and interpret the conversational implicature of this construction.

The antecedent of the adjacency pair contains the topic of common concern to both parties in the conversation, namely the ontology a, and the comparative object/vehicle/hyperbolic object b used for comparison/metaphor/hyperbole. Restoring the referent of the demonstrative pronoun "zhème/nàme" in the consequent "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction presents three possibilities, including the purely evaluative "a méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" and "b méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)", as well as the comparative and evaluative "a méi b zhème/nàme X (fǎn)". As shown in the following example:

Example 3: A: The temperature in Guangzhou on the 17th be like (Picture: Kobe opens the door, and flames and heat waves rush in)

B: Not that cool.

In Example 3, "the temperature in Guangzhou on the 17th" and the situation depicted in the picture posted by speaker A constitute a and b. Complementing the referent of the demonstrative pronoun, speaker B's "Not that cool" can produce three possible meanings:

B1: Guangzhou on the 17th is not that cool.

B2: The situation depicted in the picture is not that cool.

B3: Guangzhou on the 17th is not as cool as the situation described in the picture.

According to the hearer's cognitive experience of the real world, Guangzhou, located in a low-latitude area, is most likely not cool (B1'), and the rolling fire and heat waves depicted in the picture

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are obviously not cool either (B2'), that is, in propositions B1 and B2, it is expected that neither a nor b has the property X.

In the comparison of the negative words "bù" and "méi", "bù" negates the property, while "méi" negates the process of a thing acquiring the property from non-possession to possession. The situation where a thing does not have the property includes the situation where the "process of the thing acquiring the property from non-possession to possession" is not completed [8]. Therefore, negative words of different degrees form a scalarity in illocutionary force. According to scalar judgment, when B1' and B2' hold, B1 and B2 obviously hold [9]. Expected expressions provide relatively low information content. Therefore, when the information content provided by the expected expressions B1' and B2' is already very low, B1 and B2, which are included in B1' and B2', provide even lower information content, which is lower than the information content required by the Maxim of Quantity under the Cooperative Principle. Hence, in the process of understanding this construction, there is a tendency to exclude B1 and B2 and interpret it as B3. Let's look at other examples:

Example 4:

Figure 1. "Not that happy" in video bullet screens

A: Me having breakfast on the first day of school, September 1st: (Video: The protagonist of The Pig, the Snake and the Pigeon is sentenced to death and has his last meal before execution)

B: Not that happy.

Example 5: (Video: Cheese fondue fried chicken)

A: This calorie content, you'd have to swim from the Yangtze River to the Amazon after eating it.

B: Not that little.

If the "méi nàme X (fǎn)" expressions in Examples 4 and 5 are understood as evaluative meanings without comparative connotations, they are all generic expectations (such as "cheese fondue fried chicken has a lot of calories") or common sense expectations within a certain social scope (for students, "the first meal on the first day of school is not happy"), which are difficult to provide information content meeting the Maxim of Quantity for the conversation under the premise of the Cooperative Principle. This leads to a tendency to exclude purely evaluative interpretations and understand them as comparative meanings.

In addition, the "méi nàme X (fǎn)" expression first negates and then reverses the meaning, which is circuitous and obscure and has ambiguity. Violating the Maxim of Manner actually plays the role that "its conversational implicature can only be accurately derived by hearers who understand the

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speaker's actual situation", screening out a group of conversationalists who belong to the same speech community and have similar embodied experiences, such as the student group who does not want to start school in Example 4, to achieve cohesion of identification and identity recognition.

The violation of the Maxim of Quantity tends to eliminate ambiguous expressions of pure evaluation, and the violation of the Maxim of Manner tends to emphasize evaluative expressions with comparative meanings. Both tendencies simultaneously prompt the hearer to guide the understanding of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" to the expression "a méi b zhème/nàme X (fǎn)".

2.2. Property reversal and intensification triggering

Through pragmatic reasoning, the meaning of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" is guided to the information-rich counter-expectation expression "a méi b zhème/nàme X (fǎn)". This construction mostly appears in the consequent position of conversational adjacency pairs, with position sensitivity and typical responsive characteristics. Regarding the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction as "a méi b zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" for investigation, we find that this construction uses the metaphor or hyperbole rhetoric in the antecedent of the adjacency pair to provide a scalar reference point in interaction, expands the scalar reference frame through antonymous adjectives, and then widens the scalar difference between the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object through the comparative meaning of "méi zhème/nàme", forming intensification.

Examining the corpora, the turns responded to by the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction usually have certain metaphorical or hyperbolic colors, and some expressions carry related markers such as "belike". Metaphor or hyperbole rhetoric forms an approximate scalar relationship between the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object on the scalar reference frame of the same property, as shown in the scalar relationship expressed by the antecedent in Example 6:

Example 6: (Antecedent) A: It's so dirty, is this a septic tank? (Picture: A middle school toilet)

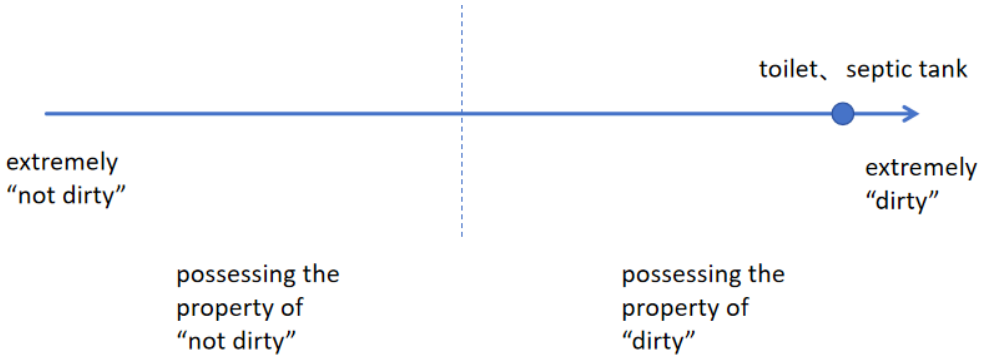

Figure 2. Scalar relationship expressed by the antecedent in Example 6

The closer the current scalarity of a thing is to the positive pole of the reference frame, the more it has the property X; the closer it is to the negative pole of the reference frame, the more it has the property X (fǎn). Therefore, the scalar relationship of things expressed by the antecedent of the adjacency pair can be abstracted as:

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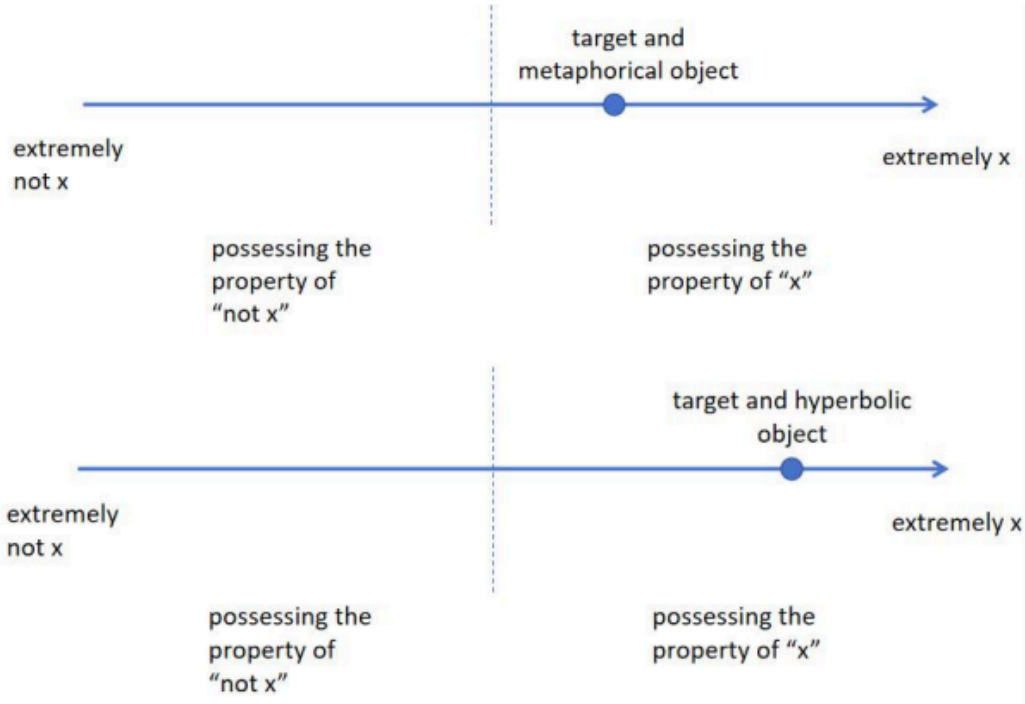

Figure 3. Scalar relationship expressed by the antecedent in the conversational adjacency pair where "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" is located

In metaphor or hyperbole rhetoric, the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object are connected due to having the same property [10]. Therefore, metaphor or hyperbole only affects the absolute positions of the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object in the reference frame, that is, compared with metaphor, the scalarity of the ontology expressed in hyperbole rhetoric can reach a position closer to "extremely X" through the hyperbolic object. However, whether it is metaphor or hyperbole, the relative scalar relationship between the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object is an approximate relationship.

In the responsive turn, the comparative expression of "méi zhème/nàme" widens the scalar difference between the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object, and X changing to X (fǎn) inverts the positions of the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object in terms of property. The scalar relationship in the responsive turn is shown in the figure:

Example 6: (Consequent) B: Not that clean.

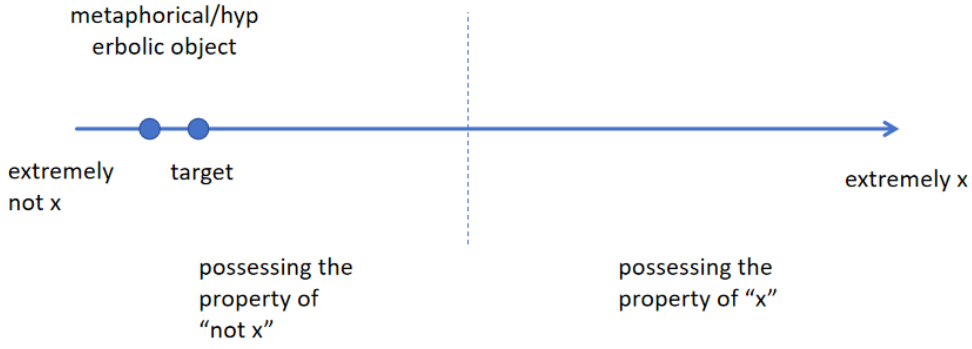

Figure 4. Scalar relationship expressed by the consequent in Example 6

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In "a méi b zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" of the responsive turn, a is the ontology (toilet), and b is the vehicle or hyperbolic object (septic tank). Compared with the vehicle or hyperbolic object, the ontology does not have the property of X (fǎn) (clean) to such an extent, then the ontology is farther from the extreme value of X (fǎn), the vehicle/hyperbolic object is closer to the extreme value of X (fǎn), and a scalar difference is generated between the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object.

In addition, since the antecedent of the adjacency pair is in the priority position of the turn, and the "a méi b zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction is in the responsive turn, after this construction reverses the semantic polarity of X, it can only move the reference points of the ontology and the vehicle/hyperbolic object, and cannot reverse the entire scalar reference frame. Therefore, the scalar reference frame in the responsive turn inherits that of the previous turn, with the maximum value still being "extremely X" and the minimum value still being "extremely X (fǎn)".

When conversationalists interact, the vehicle/hyperbolic object used is a common reference for different conversationalists to interpret the scalarity of the ontology, and most of the vehicles/hyperbolic objects used in the antecedent are well-known and have obvious scalar characteristics. Therefore, the scalarity of the vehicle/hyperbolic object is unified in the interaction, as shown in the figure:

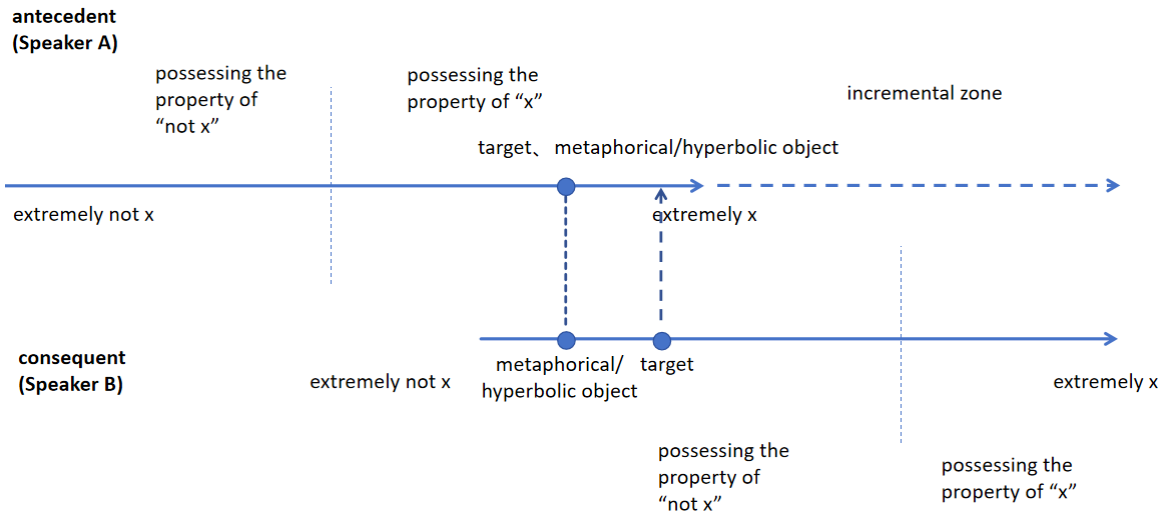

Figure 5. The scalarity of the vehicle/hyperbolic object is unified in the interaction of adjacent turns between speakers

After the scalarity of the vehicle/hyperbolic object is unified in the antecedent and consequent, the ontology of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" in the consequent is closer to "extremely X" than the ontology in the antecedent. Therefore, the latter conversationalist successfully intensifies the polarity of the thing mentioned by the former conversationalist with the help of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction. Although the ontology is in the "having X property" interval in the antecedent and in the "having X (fǎn) property" interval in the consequent, which seems contradictory, this contradiction does not constitute a decisive influence on the intensifying interpretation of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction due to the possibility of ironic interpretation, but instead provides the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction with humorous, sarcastic and other colors.

If the speaker in the antecedent uses a hyperbolic expression and the scalarity of the ontology is already very high, that is, very close to "extremely X", then the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction in the consequent may cause the intensified ontology to fall into the "intensified part"

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interval. Furthermore, the proposition related to this construction forms an over-expressive statement, the possibility of its establishment further decreases, and produces exaggerated effects and unexpected colors [11]. As shown in the figure:

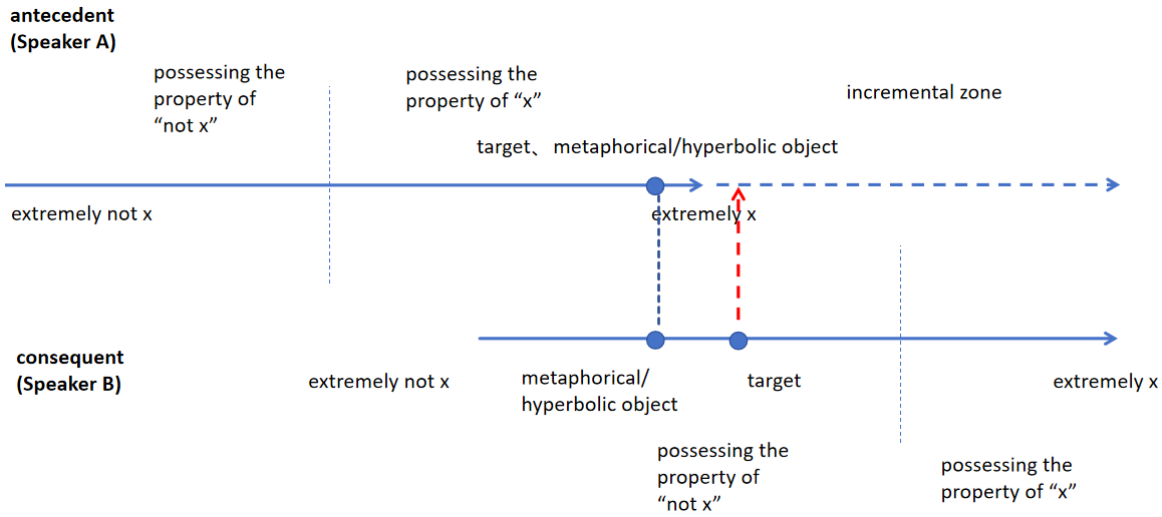

Figure 6. The scalarity of the ontology falls into the intensified interval in interaction, achieving exaggeration

Since the intensifying function of this construction is realized by moving and expanding the scalar reference frame, rather than simply moving the scalar point, compared with the typical intensifying construction "gèng X", no matter how exaggerated the expression used by the conversationalist in the antecedent is and how close the scalarity of the ontology is to the extreme value of the reference frame, the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction in the consequent can achieve intensification. Therefore, intensifying extreme expressions is a significant function of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction.

3. The formation motivation of intensifying expressions

The "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction was born in the internet new media environment. The emergence of its intensifying function, on the one hand, is because the mother construction "méi zhème/nàme X" has de-intensifying and comparative functions, which have the possibility of scalar reversal and expressing intensifying functions; on the other hand, the speech communities in internet media have a strong driving force for the emergence of new expressions. Both internal and external linguistic factors promote the generation of the intensifying construction "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)".

3.1. Mother construction factor

The mother construction "méi zhème/nàme X" itself has functions such as evaluation, revision and comparison, providing an intermediate environment for the generation of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)". The intermediate environments are as follows:

Things described by speakers are inherently multifaceted. When different speakers focus on different aspects of a thing, it will trigger the evaluation function of "méi zhème/nàme X".

Example 7: (Comment event: ICE executed a 37-year-old white male by shooting in the street)

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A: What's the difference between this and the Stormtroopers and the SS in Nazi Germany during World War II?

B: Not that disciplined, not that formal.

Under the topic of Example 4, both A and B have a negative tendency towards the thing "ICE" described. In the context of the overall negative tendency, A and B focus on different specific properties. A focuses on the property of ICE "killing civilians indiscriminately" and compares it to "the Stormtroopers and the SS in Nazi Germany during World War II". However, while intending to evaluate ICE, B notices the properties such as "discipline" and "formality" that ICE and the SS should share as military forces. Therefore, he uses the "méi nàme" construction to evaluate properties such as "discipline" and "formality" which are different from A's focus, and at the same time expresses the same negative tendency towards the thing described, namely ICE, as A.

The objective world is inherently complex, especially when a thing has contradictory interpretations in different directions on the same property, it will trigger revisions by different speakers based on the same property:

Example 8: (Comment event: Why do rear cameras have very high pixels but take ugly photos of people?)

A: Taken by others: Me in the rear camera:

(Picture: A girl's ID photo, with fair skin, big eyes and thick eyebrows; but at the same time, the text on the picture says crooked nose, uneven eyebrows, asymmetrical face)

B: I'm not that good-looking.

Different speakers A and B participate in the discussion of the topic "rear cameras take ugly photos of people" combined with their own embodied experiences. In the comment, A intends to illustrate the proposition "the photos taken by my male friend with the rear camera are ugly" through the descriptions such as "crooked nose, uneven eyebrows, asymmetrical face" in the picture. However, B notices the features of the person in the picture such as "fair skin, big eyes and thick eyebrows" which point to the property of "good-looking", and uses "Not that good-looking" to revise the property of "good-looking" in A's picture, meaning "the photos taken by the rear camera of myself are not as good-looking as the one in the picture". Different conversationalists use "méi zhème X" to revise information on the same property "ugly/good-looking".

The corpora show that conversationalists may use the "méi zhème/nàme X" biased towards the evaluation function based on different properties, or use the "méi zhème/nàme X" biased towards the revision function based on the same property. When these two types of intermediate environments interact and merge, a "méi zhème/nàme X" based on the same property but biased towards the evaluation function can be generated.

3.2. Irony rhetoric factor

The negativity of emotional tendency in the context creates conditions for the generation of irony rhetoric, promoting the adjective X used to evaluate the properties of things to become X (fǎn) through irony rhetoric.

Examining the environment where the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction appears, the contexts where this construction first appeared were mostly campus life. Among the 86 internet topics involved in the corpora, 16 are related to "campus life", all with negative tendencies, including negative contents such as "dirty toilets", "faculty corruption", "not wanting to start school", "difficult exams" and "senior three exhaustion". Most of the speakers are students, who are directly negatively affected by the things corresponding to these topics, and most of them are minors, who are in a relatively weak position psychologically and in terms of power compared with

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the school. Therefore, under the influence of external environmental suppression and personal psychology in the context, they tend to think that "directly expressing dissatisfaction with negative things in the school" is inappropriate, that is, using the negative "X (zhèng)" is inappropriate. This intentional attitude is more likely to lead to ironic expressions [12], namely "X (fǎn)". In addition, since students appear in large numbers in internet speech communities, satirizing negative things on campus has become a cultural consensus within this community, which has adaptability in the communicative context, thus having the conditions to use irony to meet communicative needs and produce humorous effects [13].

Expanding the topics beyond campus life, 38 of the other 70 topics are related to negative emotional tendencies, including contents such as "exorbitant bride price", "small housing", "wealth inequality", "long overtime hours" and "ferocious pets". These contents are not only emotionally negative, but also mostly things that speakers cannot subjectively improve. Therefore, the evaluation of these topics still applies to typical ironic expressions: mostly "saying the opposite of what one means", forcibly converting negative contents into positive evaluations to add sarcastic colors [14].

In terms of construction, "méi zhème/nàme X" itself has communicative functions of comparison, evaluation and revision; in terms of context, negative contexts are prone to ironic expressions related to "X (fǎn)". Under the influence of context on construction, the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" with intensifying function appears mixed with "méi zhème/nàme X (zhèng)", as shown in the following example:

Example 9: (Video content: An extremely smart dog that can execute its owner's commands quickly and correctly)

A: Much smarter than my boss.

B: Not that stupid.

C: Not that smart.

D: Not that cute.

Speakers B, C and D reply to A in the same comment section, forming three pairs of adjacent conversational turns with A's speech as the antecedent respectively. Among them, B perceives A's communicative intention of emphasizing "the dog is smart" and satirizing "the boss is stupid", and uses the intensifying construction "méi nàme X (fǎn)" to raise the scalarity of "the boss is stupid", meaning "the dog is not as stupid as A said", which can be deduced that "the dog is much smarter than the boss"; C uses "Not that smart" to perform a "revision" speech act on the information provided by A on the pair of features "smart/stupid", meaning "the dog is not as smart as the boss"; D uses "Not that cute" to jump out of the pair of features "smart/stupid" that A focuses on and carry out an "evaluation" speech act on the thing in terms of other features. After complementing the referent of the demonstrative pronoun, it is as follows:

Example 9 (Supplemented): (Video content: An extremely smart dog that can execute its owner's commands quickly and correctly)

A: (The dog) is much smarter than my boss.

B: (The dog) is not as stupid as (the boss).

C: (The dog) is not as smart as (the boss) / (The boss) is not as smart as (the dog).[2]

[2] In the questionnaire, on the question of how to interpret C's "Not that smart", 33.04% of the respondents interpreted it as "the degree of the thing described is lower than that depicted by A", corresponding to "(The dog) is not as smart as (the boss)", and 41.07% interpreted it as "the degree of the thing described is higher than that depicted by A", corresponding to "(The boss) is not as smart as(the dog)". The proportions are not much different, which can be considered that "Not that smart" here has ambiguous interpretations with similar acceptability.

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D: (The boss) is not that cute.

3.3. Network media factor

Network media promotes the generation of many new expressions including the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction at the macro level, and at the micro level, introduces intensification into the "méi zhème/nàme X" construction by emphasizing opinion identification in online speech communities, thus endowing this construction with the functions of deepening the degree of things and identifying the nature of things.

At the macro level, the development of social media has enabled communication to cross time and space constraints, making it possible to exchange information and emotions on a larger scale [15]. Today's internet has a huge user group and convenient network facilities, coupled with the popularization of self-media platforms, the internet has entered an era of information explosion [16]. In the context of information explosion and the lack of offline communicative resources such as facial expressions, rhythm and gestures, internet users use limited resources to generate new forms, that is, through short videos, emojis or new functions of inherent text expressions, to carry out visual modal compensation, transmit the same amount of information as offline communication, and realize communication [17].

In addition, while the quantity of network information is exploding, the attention resources that need to be competed for are relatively limited. Therefore, netizens tend to use intensifying, massive and extreme expressions to improve the visibility and competitiveness of their personal information, and this characteristic also promotes the generation of the intensifying expression "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction [17].

At the micro level, social language life in cyberspace is highly stratified. Netizens with different social identities gather in different circles, forming different communicative groups, and producing language habits, hot topics and discourse styles with the characteristics of these circles [5]. However, compared with offline speech communities which are mainly composed of acquaintances and have human relationship accumulation and interest interaction, online speech communities lack social cornerstones and stability maintenance mechanisms [6], so they mainly rely on opinion identification to construct and maintain themselves [7]. In online communities where the general tendency is to seek identification, the "méi zhème/nàme X" expression with comparative and evaluative functions is easily understood as identification with opinions, and then from "identification" to reverse inference, the intensifying function of "antonymous intensification to express property identification" is interpreted.

In summary, the network media where the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction is common has the characteristics of information explosion promoting extreme expressions and emphasizing identification to identity and condense specific communities. In this environment, adolescent online speech communities have gathered, and the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction has emerged in these communities.

3.4. Speech community factor

The "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction first appeared in the context of evaluating negative things on campus. Since the corpora contain contents such as "senior three", "fill-in-the-blank questions in Chinese exams", "history exams" and "monthly exams", it can be judged that the main speakers using the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction in the "campus life" context are mostly junior and senior high school students. Young people are the main force leading language change

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[18], and the speech community composed of junior and senior high school youth has promoted the generation and stabilization of the "méi nàme X (fǎn)" construction.[3]

In terms of adolescent psychology, junior and senior high school students, on the one hand, pursue individuality, so they tend to create and accept new expressions in language; on the other hand, they seek external recognition of themselves, so they also actively follow and imitate others in language expression [19]. Under the dual psychological effects of following imitation and pursuing individuality, the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction, which imitates the form of "méi zhème/nàme X" but expresses a unique intensifying function, emerged among adolescents.

In addition, the main activity place of junior and senior high school students is middle school campuses, with concentrated physical space, similar lifestyles, converging embodied experiences of things, and tolerant attitudes towards language. The relatively homogeneous offline communities have formed relatively homogeneous speech communities. Many new expressions including "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" are not only the external embodiment of the linguistic characteristics in the speech community, but also maintain the internal stability of the speech community and the identity recognition among members [20].

Therefore, the speech community composed of junior and senior high school students has promoted the generation of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction and its stable use within the community.

4. Constraints on the use of the construction

Although the intensifying usage of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction has shown signs of being stereotyped, it has not yet been widely accepted in language life. The factors restricting language users from understanding and generating the intensifying construction "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" are as follows:

Cognitive factor: Compared with intensifying constructions with similar functions, such as "bǐ n hái n/a", "méi zhème/nàme X" is shorter in form but carries more information, containing rhetorical colors such as irony and exaggeration while performing comparison and intensification. The concise structure accompanied by high information content consumes more cognitive effort from the hearer/reader [21], limiting the economy of language use and restricting the spread and acceptance of the intensifying construction "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)".

Media factor: The intensifying evaluation construction "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" appeared later than the implementation of the "picture comment" function on platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Bilibili and Baidu Tieba. Vivid and visual picture media have stronger material tension, enabling subjects to identify and interact with each other at the level of life experience [22]. This characteristic of picture media promotes different speakers to unify the scalarity of the vehicle/hyperbolic object in the comprehension process of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)". However, if the speaker does not understand the meaning behind internet meme pictures well, they may not use or misuse the construction, affecting its spread. In addition, pictures play a role in both the generation and comprehension of the construction, which also limits the generation of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" in occasions without pictures.

[3] In the questionnaire, for the typical "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction, the proportions of respondents who made intensifying interpretations in the three age groups of 12-18 years old, 18-25 years old and 25-30 years old were 83.3%, 69.6% and 85.7% respectively, proving that the intensifying interpretation of this construction has achieved relatively universal acceptance in adolescent speech communities.

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Speech community factor: The intensifying understanding of "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" is highly dependent on speech communities with similar lifestyles, similar evaluations and embodied experiences of things, and the same attitude towards language. Speakers using this construction need to understand the metaphorical or hyperbolic expressions in the antecedent of the adjacency pair based on their experience and cognition of the real world; hearers need to exclude overly expected ambiguities that do not meet the Maxim of Quantity and successfully interpret the conversational implicature of this construction based on the social expectations shared with the speakers. Both speakers and hearers also need to have a common language attitude: being open and inclusive of new forms, and not avoiding non-standard, carnivalized, language-game-like expressions [16]. The intensifying understanding of the "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" construction is too dependent on the speech community where it was generated, making it difficult to spread outside the speech community to form universal acceptance.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes the emerging intensifying evaluation construction "méi zhème/nàme X (fǎn)" as the research object, and systematically examines its interpretation mechanism, formation motivation and usage constraints within the theoretical perspectives of Construction Grammar and Interactional Linguistics, comprehensively applying theories of pragmatic inference, counter-expectation and speech community.

This construction relies on conversational implicature for interpretation, triggers intensification in interaction by reversing scalarity, emerges in adolescent online speech communities that emphasize opinion identification, and spreads to other age groups through network media. The significant function of this construction is to further intensify exaggerated or extreme expressions, demonstrating the creativity and linguistic vitality of generating new forms in the new media context. However, the use and spread of this construction are restricted by three factors: cognition, media and community. At present, as an unstandardized usage, it has not yet achieved universal acceptance both online and offline.

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